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BANDS AND REBELS

Seven Stories in Verse

BY

KEENE WALLIS

*Sing bands and rebels
And rebels and troubles.
Sing new, new.*

HILLBILLY SONG BALLAD



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*Coal Black Jesus **

THE boy had settled gladly in his seat, thinking, "Nice walking trip but for the heat. "Good-by you hills, I'll soon be on a street," when he looked up and dazedly down again.

The florid man in front pulled down a blind and called, "Want anything? How are you riding, men?"

"We're riding fine," said one, "all ready for the pen."

And now the train had left the town behind.

The boy was shocked to think that he should stray

into *their* car, but could he sneak away?

What poor hill-billy criminals were they?

These red-faced swells were deputies, no doubt, that big man was the sheriff, he supposed.

Now if a person rose and slowly sauntered out would these poor devils raise a comic-dreadful shout?

The car door opened, swaying as it closed.

** The Blindman prize poem, 1925. By permission of the Poetry Society of South Carolina.*

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The fatherly conductor now lurched in. Taking the young man's ticket with a grin, he winked, "My son, abandon ways of sin," then looked around the car good naturedly over the glasses sagging at his nose.

The silence was acute as swaying placidly the old man left that trap of helpless infamy. A wave of nervous laughter slowly rose.

The boy flushed fiercely and put up the blind. People were standing in the car behind. . . . This was the only seat that he could find. . . . He did not like to try it, anyway. . . .

The noise and horseplay started up again. Hectic hilarity was in the air today; false laughter shrilled; the men began to romp and play—

if you could call these chained gorillas men.

There was a yellow girl whose porous face glowed strangely as she sang of heaven's grace. Four other handcuffed members of her race swayed fervently and joined her doleful wail, "*Ain gonna go to hebbin when you die*" "*lessen child Jesus say you can!*" and wheel and rail

accompanied their rhapsody as vague and pale the wooded hills and hollows floated by.

With forearms on the dusty window sill the boy watched hollow curving into hill

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and meadow racing backward, never still,
and listened to the rattle of the train
that merged into accord with the hymn.

"Child Jesus, our own Jesus," came the dismal
strain

from those black prisoners, ecstatic in their pain.

The silence of the whites was tense and grim.

Meadow flashed into gully in the flight
of objects rising at uneven height
as cloud-cast shadow passed to tranquil light
and whirls of dust arose before the breeze
that whipped in through the window now and
then.

The negroes were still caroling, but by degrees
their voices whined away; the singers on their
knees

sent up a prayer then rose and sang again.

To a jail tune a white man howled a jeer.
As others joined him it was good to hear.

The honest lewdness of it soothed the ear
after the raptures of that colored band
who, singing, had forgotten where they were.

A buggy waited at a crossing. Fiercely
fanned,
rocked, the girl in it shuddered as a fettered
hand

dragged up its chain mate to be waved at her.

The song was parodied to an attack

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on the big sheriff, who was laughing back
a witty answer to the yelping pack.
Easily condescending—not too far—
he called above the clangor of the cars,
“I cain’t get mad at you’ns if that’s the kind
you are,”

and, when the quaking butcher skulked into the
car,

bought the men salted peanuts and cigars.

In front of where the boy was sitting, lay
a lazy giant dreaming far away
from this buffoonery and restless play.
His face hacked out of rock, his troubled eyes,
looked sick, not sullen but as if resigned.
He reached up for his cap in all his hampered
size.

The sheriff got it for him as he tried to rise,
and there was something on the sheriff’s mind.

“Curly,” the sheriff said, “I fired that guard.
“I’m glad you hit the skunk and hit him hard.
“He skinned my boys. I’d have the scoundrel
tarred—

“I’d hang him, if they’d let me.”

Both men smiled,
and there was bland enjoyment in their smile,
for each was equally a monster and a child,
innocent, elemental, violent and mild.
The sheriff turned and loitered up the aisle.

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The boy leaned back to look at Curly's jaw.
Then at the burly officer of law.
And it was with repugnance that he saw
the other prisoners and deputies—
hog-thieves and small-town swells!—But he was
glad
there were two men along, two personalities
that recognized a fellowship of sympathies
under the uniforms of good and bad.

What was the meaning of the pantomime
that yellow girl was making, beating time,
humming what must have been a cradle rhyme
and nursing an imaginary child?
He strained his ears and tried to catch the song.
He could not hear it, and the negress looked so
wild
that he was glad he could not, and he sighed and
smiled,
and still the train rolled patiently along.

A deputy parading up and down,
rubbing the polished bald spot on his crown,
spoke to the boy, whom he had seen in town,
and, as they talked of coming rain and drouth,
pointing as well as caution would allow
at Curly, whispered from the corner of his
mouth,
"Train robber. Served six years. They caught
him going south.

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"Wench? Peddles dope. She's got some in her now."

The train came slowly to a town and there exposed the postured ruffians to the stare of people gathered in from everywhere. The engine palpitated painfully and with a heave the train got under way. The prisoners were still. Some glowered sullenly,

one tried to go to sleep and shifted awkwardly, and all were too wornout to fight and play.

Then all was quiet, for the wench's croon was soundless as the hum of afternoon.

"Child Jesus, baby Jesus, mammy's coon," she mumbled in a dreary monotone; and there was ecstasy on each black face as the four negroes joined her with a varied moan.

One started to exhort, beginning with a groan, "Oh coal black Jesus of ou' sinful race!

"You bawn in sin *and* sorrow, yess'ndeed!

"De white man catch you and he make you bleed.

"We kiss yo' rod and clasp yo' saintligh creed—"

At first amused and then in vague alarm the white boy noticed with what pious joy the yellow girl in her emaciated arm shielded the sacred "baby" from imagined harm,

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wailing, "Oh coal black Jesus, mammy's boy!"

It was disgusting but amusing too.

Then it was terrible as whining through
the tortured air the pining sonance grew,
and sighs began to mingle with the stir
of restless men who fretted at the chain,
as wheel and rail were blending their metallic
whir

into the virgin's music and were lending her
a rhyme scheme for her monody of pain.

Her brethren in an ecstasy of fright
swayed back and forth with metrical delight.
Two white men in despair began a fight
but could not keep it up and weakly quit.

The wind rushed in and out and cooled the
car,
then lightning flashed and thunder crashed right
after it.

The men looked up and wondered where the bolt
had hit.

There came another flash, another jar.

The clouds wheeled over where the sun had
been.

A blinding whirl of rain came sweeping in
and nothing could be heard above the din
of clanking chains and windows rattling down.
Long dotted strokes of moisture streaked each
pane,

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then quickly were erased as floating hill and
town
were swallowed in the waters threatening to
drown
the entire world outside the plodding train.

The lightning flashes and the thunderbolts
followed each other fast in blinding jolts,
and unfilled outlines—mares and donkey
colts—

were running wildly over unseen ground.
Vague, unreal trees were struggling with the
storm,
and some were ripped to pieces, some were
wrenched around.

The rain beat at the window with a pleasant
sound
and flocks of little drops began to form.

An eager gayety was in the air.
The men pressed to the windows everywhere
to glimpse the blur that rushed along out there.
Not one was hearing what the others said,
for each was talking loudly, busily,
and pushing, jostling, merrily, to get his head
right up against the glass and glimpse that world
which fled
through white and gray and rumbled savagely.

But soon one voice was heard above the rest,
coaching the lightning with a sporting zest,

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mocking the marksmanship: "Is that your best?"
"Cain't hit a moving target! Whur's your eye?—

"Good boy, you're getting close!"

"'y God, you are!"

another shouted, and the rest began to vie
with these in witty efforts as the rain flashed by
and thunderbombs exploded with a jar.

The boy, relieved as they were when the rain
drowning the world drowned out the song of
pain

and washed the sanctity out of the train,
had pressed his face against the glass to see
the vagueness lighted by the lightning's blaze,
but now was sitting with his elbow on his knee
and as he ceased to heed the shouts in every key
he caught the lazy bandit's curious gaze.

. The septic atmosphere seemed fresh and clean.

A look of understanding passed between
the bandit and the boy, for each had seen
honest good humor in the other's smile.
Curly made some remark. The boy replied
abstractedly, and thus they laughed and joked
awhile.

The train rolled on and on, mile after flooded
mile,

and still the rain swept down from every side.

The men had settled in their seats once more

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and each one talked more loudly than before
but nothing could be heard above the roar
of thunder and the clatter of the rain.
Sometimes there was a hiss and then a glare
as lightning blazed nearby, but unperturbed the
train
plunged on into the storm and shook from every
pane
a shower of drops which had collected there.

The deputies were wandering around,
and each one was declaiming as he found
some listener to whom he could propound
a question as to politics or crops.
The bald man whistled into the boy's ear
that there had been a lockout in the railroad
shops.

The boy was busy numbering the shaken drops
outside his window sill and did not hear.

The sheriff had not moved, but sitting still
smiled at the antics of the men, until
he too was penetrated by the thrill
with which the storm had charged the heavy air,
and getting up he made the rounds to see
that all the men were comfortable. Here and
there
he called a cheery word or stopped to joke and
swear
and was howled down with lusty repartee.

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Unthinkingly the boy looked on ahead
and saw the negroes with returning dread,
for one had made a motion of the head
as if to start the others on that tune.
But there was ecstasy on each black face.
The yellow girl was lying in a holy swoon.
And there were no responses to the brother's
croon

of "*Coal Black Jesus of ou' sinful race.*"

The noise and laughter died away, and soon,
although the negro hushed that croon, that
croon,

the melancholy cadence of that tune,
silenced but growing more insistent yet,
seemed to be running in the heavy air.
The men moved awkwardly and wiped away the
sweat
with which—they had not noticed it—their
cheeks were wet.

The rain sailed down and thunder moaned out
there.

There was an end to all the merriment.

The men looked up in shocked bewilderment.
They were reminded of their punishment
and conscious of their fetters as before.
They looked with wonder at the yellow girl,
then settled back to listen to the thunder's roar

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which now was tame and dismal as they tried
once more

to lose their torment in the tempest's whirl.

The yellow girl lay still. She had not moved.
It was with effort that the boy removed
his eyes from those wan features which reproved
the human world about the yellow seer,
the earthly world from which she held aloof.
The air vibrated with the ghostly song of fear
which though it long had ceased the prisoners
could hear. . . .

It was the downpour drumming at the roof.

The boy began to tell himself a tale
of Curly and the sheriff to prevail
over the spell, but knew that he must fail,
so he surrendered to it for a time.
Then picturing the visionary's "child,"
a nigger-minstrel Jesus, an abject, sublime,
crass deity of drugs, of gin, of craps, of crime,
the boy shook off the spell and even smiled.

The inexhaustible supply of rain
kept spilling down on every window pane,
and imperturbably the rattling train
kept galloping along its even way.
The boy lay back, wishing the ride were done,
that these men were locked up and he were far
away

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bragging of the adventure he had had today to people who would—envy him the fun!

The air trembled as it had trembled when the girl was singing with the colored men. He hoped that she would not wake up again. It would be maddening to see her nurse the black Immanuel she thought she held. He wished that some one would let out a human curse.

He wished that some one would begin to chant a verse so that the ghastly calm could be dispelled.

Could some one laugh and make these men forget their cramped position and the galling fret that chafed their wrists, or must they sit and let their thoughts intensify their wretchedness? Could something happen that would clear the air?

For if the rain kept up the fetid stuffiness would grow into a vapor whose oppressiveness would be too much for tortured nerves to bear.

Somebody ought to speak a word of cheer to these poor felons, one whom they would hear, not some one over them whom they would fear but who like them had fretted at a chain, one who like them had suffered for a crime

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and now could come along and laugh away their
pain
and as he suffered with them could relieve the
strain
and help them pass away the deadly time.

Some one like Curly who had served before
could come along and put them in a roar
and make them feel that they were men once
more.

It took a badman like the bandit, too,
to make chained apes respect themselves as men.
No lily-white evangelist or saint would do,
no priest ordained immaculate who never knew
how to be villainous and kind again.

A song would start them as the rain had done
awhile ago when it had first begun,
and merriment would make them feel at one
with better-fated members of the race.

Why did not Curly try to start the song?

Now that the boy looked up he read in Curly's
face

an acute consciousness of torment, of disgrace,
and wonder that the journey was so long.

No. The air ached with prison hopelessness,
weariness, sullenness, forsakenness,
and an attempt at cheery humanness
would have been painful, pitiful to see.

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The boy leaned back. His thoughts began to whirl.

He was as helpless as the men though he was free.

Some one could rouse them, but this savior had to be——

"My coal black Jesus!" howled the yellow girl.

Up and Down and Out

WHEN Clarence slipped and fell I came on
back.

I could not tramp without my colored friend
to cheer the nights of walking down a track
that stretched for miles and miles without a
bend,

or nights of riding cramped in space for one,
and lazy days of drowsing in the sun.

For us as tramps all life was risk and fun,
but there, in bloody fragments, was the end.

I cleaned him off the rail and watched all
night,

then went into the nearby town next day
and got the poor lad buried, buried right.

The undertaker gave me time to pay,
so I was in that town for quite awhile
charming the town girls with my city smile.

I liked the burg, but made my little pile
and paid a railroad fare to get away.

The two of us are sailing through the gloom
in space enough for one; there comes a moan
and I am traveling with too much room.

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and stumbling sideways with a choking groan
and almost following the poor mashed lad.

I jump far out, but as my aim is bad
I nearly kill myself. I wish I had,
when scrambling up, crippled and all alone.

The coaches pass me and the air is full
of nervous quivers as I crawl and creep
dragging my body in a long hard pull
out of the weeds—and is that rock bank steep!

One rail is shining bare and smooth and
bright,

a line of nickel stretching through the night,
the other is a mauled and bloody sight.

I cough and rake the mess into a heap.

I lie beside the huddle near the track.
A cottonwood is grieving overhead
mournfully, warningly, and bringing back
nights when the dead spoke to the lad now dead.
I begin thinking of the sane, bright days
through which we loafed together, blithe as
jays,

of shaded culverts, silent wooded ways,
and the free life the two of us have led.

I think of soaking mornings when the skies
have turned to water and the world to fog:
Clarence with sorrow in his earnest eyes
is looking mournful like a little dog;
my very flesh is wet inside my skin,

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my shirt hangs to me and a chill strikes in,
whole trains of raindrops travel down my chin;
I steer my squirting shoes through squashing
bog;

I want to shout a curse, but try instead
to think of something funny. And I do.

Clarence looks up at me, throws back his head,
and here his laugh comes, resonant and true,
that gifted laughter which the nigger owns,
magical as his incantation moans,
with something tragic in the undertones
to warn, alarm, and thrill you through and
through.

Another time we two are in a town.
I "introduce the entertainer" who
gets up and gives the crowd a wild hoe-down,
a din of lusty voice and slapping shoe.
The farmers stand there stiffly for awhile,
then every face takes on a languid smile,
the bodies sway and let the sound beguile
their senses into pleasures wholly new.

The frisking caper of the foolish words
is running through the town, through all out-
doors.

The measure caught from fiddles and from birds
has brought the farmers from the banks and
stores.

He stops. You feel a wave of wonder, doubt.

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And then his magic nigger laugh breaks out.
He throws his head back with a joyous shout.
The crowd look up and everybody roars.

While they are feeling good I pass the hat,
clearing enough to keep us for a week.

We loaf along, discussing this and that
and hearing many lines that he can speak.
"Remember that one, Clarence," I will say,
and he will be improving it all day.

A farm wife rails. We file her curse away
with notes on the details of her technique.

... I lie back looking at the restless tree
that shimmers ghostly white against the sky.

It strikes me disagreeably that he
was always serving me, was always shy,
and that I never answered him a word
but Clarence most respectfully deferred.
It hurts my feelings. It was too absurd,
for he was right much oftener than I.

The breeze moans through the tree and whines
and grieves——

I tell myself, "You liked it once, all right!"—
rippling the spangles of the dangling leaves—
"You knew that he was black and you were
white,

"that he was small and so he had to raise
"his eyes to you, and that he lived on praise."

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A cottonwood can think of cruel ways
to make you wretched on a summer night.

Then all at once the life that we have led
seems a fool business. What else can it be?
How can I stand it now that he is dead?
I wonder what is to become of me. . . .

Hills, roads, and towns flare up before my
eyes.

The pictures whirl together as they rise.
My chin is quivering, to my surprise,
and lying there I damn that mournful tree.

For three months past we two have tramped
along.

Neither has ever left the other's sight.

And he has heartened us with song on song,
songs which he never would consent to write,
and now the head which held them all is
crushed,

the eager voice that chanted them is hushed,
the overland which killed the boy has rushed,
unconscious of its work, into the night.

For three months we have been together thus
and shared the hardships and the luck and cheer,
and yet back in the city both of us
had worked in the same building for a year
and never passed a word except, "Hello,"
and "Mawnin, boss," for how could either know

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the other was a lad with whom to go
around the world in one long mad career?

He ran his elevator up and down,
and on the sixteenth floor I earned my pay!
And in the mornings when I got downtown
I could not think of anything to say,
for I was never more than half awake
out of the street-car nap I used to take
from daily habit which I could not break—
and if I had I might have stayed away!—

Clarence was small and had a serious face.
The office men had somehow come to hear
that Clarence had been honored by his race,
at colored high school in his senior year,
as orator and poet.

"Give him time.

"He's got it, boys! Now reel us off a rhyme."

"Oh lawdy, Clarence, ain't de moon sublime?"
and "I'm a poet; did you know it, dear?"

One Monday morning I had come down late.
I had not slept, for I had had a seat
and started thinking in my restless state
while counting off the corners, street by street.
Why should I go to work? I had my pay.
But when my corner came I took my way
out into the already busy day,
already lively in the growing heat.

Men were already crowding out and in.

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The girl was busy at the counter, too.
So I was later than I'd ever been.
I pushed and did my best to hurry through.

The elevator waited at the floor,
standing there empty and with open door.
When I get in it waits a little more.
I did not mind, though. I was late, I knew.

Nobody came, so Clarence slammed the doors
with such a clash that little sparkles showed.

We sailed up smoothly past the numbered
floors,
and as nobody added to our load
I made a speech in which I tried to show
how base it was to work, how downright low,
and quoted bitterly a line or so
of poetry about the open road.

He whirled around and waved his free left
hand
impressively and started chanting through
the poem, which, he made me understand,
I had misquoted, as of course was true.

He emphasized the words that I had missed,
wriggled his coat sleeve down to bare his wrist,
and with a gesture nothing could resist
recited all the poetry he knew.

His solemn gestures, his impassioned voice,
his thrilling tones and his enraptured face

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amused me painfully, as did his choice which was too classical for such a place.

I had not noticed when we reached the top. He did not notice either, did not stop the elevator, simply let it drop dizzily downward through ascending space.

As we came rushing through the rising air I was knocked out as if I had been hit.

Clarence moaned out the message of despair of some poor minor poet doomed to sit beside us others on the ground, and who had been borne upward, singing as he flew, had searched the heavens, finding nothing new, and then had fallen back into the pit.

Clarence came to before we fell to death. We settled slowly to the basement floor. We paused an instant for a steady breath and Clarence leaned against the grated door to look at me with triumph in his eyes.

Then he began, this time to improvise, and, as he paused to perfect and revise, the elevator started up once more.

He got to be the subject of his lines, a nigger pappy praying to the dice, addressing them beseechingly with whines of flattery and fatherly advice.

As we went up the gambler's prayers arose. As we went higher he was on his toes.

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And as we reached the top his fervor froze.
"Bones, turnin' on yo' daddy—is zat nice?"

He moaned of his misfortune as we fell.
As we went rushing down the mimic laughed
hysterically, then he raised a yell
which trembled with the motion of our craft.

This time our hideous descent was brief,
and still re-echoing that burst of grief
the elevator slowed, to my relief,
and stopped about the middle of the shaft.

He took us slowly to the top once more
and once again he started to intone,
with one foot tapping on the matted floor,
and now and then he hushed and gave a groan,
but tapping on the matting all the time,
using his free left hand to pantomime
a dancing motion and enforce the rhyme,
he droned a measure in a monotone.

When I had got to swaying on my feet
the elevator dipped and steadied, dipped
and steadied, regulated by the beat,
the steady beat, beat, beat which never skipped;
the elevator dipped and steadied, made
a swift descent, then dipped and steadied, swayed
and dipped and steadied, dipped and steadied,
played
and lilted as the cadence hopped and tripped.

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Faster, faster, and faster came the beat.
Faster, faster, the elevator fell.

My head was whirling. I was off my feet
but was sustained by some unholy spell.
My feet were dancing, dancing in the air.
I felt as if I were not anywhere.
Perhaps I was not, and I did not care
while we rushed down that sixteen-story well.

We settled slowly to the basement floor.

I had been conscious of a band of white
stretching along the shaft outside the door,
a ribbon formed of faces blanched with fright.
And I could hear a tramping on the stairs.
The business men were leaving their affairs.
I was not sure but thought I heard their prayers
or curses as they shuddered at the sight.

Clarence did not accompany our flight
with cakewalk measures as we mounted high
and all those faces and those suits of white
passed like a single line before my eye.

Faster we rose and faster, faster still,
faster we rose and deeper sank the chill
into my fingers and my cheeks until
we reached the sixteenth story or the sky.

He did not keep us there. We simply
dropped.

And this time we were traveling indeed!

My breathing and my pulse abruptly stopped.

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My lungs were crammed with wind they did not need.

My veins were choked with blood and thick and tight.

I could not see that wavy line of white.

I could not think of anything but night and death and blackness and ferocious speed.

Then we were standing at the entrance floor. The door was open and a crowd was there.

I caught my breath and was myself once more, encircled by a vague, composite stare, a gaze of horror which was many-eyed.

Clarence was trembling and his jaw hung wide.

He came a little closer to my side and looked at me with a beseeching air.

"Clarence," I said, "I see our jobs are gone." I pointed to the scared and angry crowd. "Let's us go too."

"Yuh right," said he, "come on!"

The crowd divided for us and allowed the two of us to swagger down a lane between two rows of horror and disdain, and the cigar girl wore a look of pain as we went past the counter and I bowed.

The world was there before us, not a world of torrid sidewalks and of baking streets, for through the traffic as it rushed and whirled

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we looked at country roads and cool retreats,
we looked at gleaming tracks and speeding
trains,

we saw the loosening of all our chains,
the end of all our toils and city pains,
of great ambitions and grotesque defeats.

The road life was before us, not a life
of swindling people as poetic clowns,
of begging dinner from some country wife
and flattering away indignant frowns.
We did not figure how exposure feels.
We did not know how we should miss our meals.
We did not think about the crushing wheels
nor calabooes in the country towns.

Chance was outside there, risk was just out-
side,
daring within us, youth which knew no doubt,
and danger was appealing to our pride,
and novelty awaited us without.

I waved back at the counter solemnly
and Clarence bowed with comic courtesy.
I looked at him, he looked up eagerly,
and brave in ignorance we sauntered out.

Spoiling on His Hands

"*WELL*, I've met the lady

"who can marry me.

"Lady, lady, lady!

"I have found my lady

"and she takes to me.

"Boarders, meet the lady

"and you'll murder me!

"Yes, tonight we're going

"to a highbrow play.

"'Masterpiece is showing,'

"she informs me, knowing

"I'm inclined that way.

"—Lordy! is it snowing?

"Must I work today?

"Darling, are you sleeping?

"Go ahead, just so

"nothing happens, keeping

"you and me from creeping

"out to see our show.

"'Ma' will have you sweeping

"if you wake, I know.

BANDS AND REBELS

“Darling, are you dreaming
“that we sit once more
“planning, planning, scheming
“while the cold comes streaming
“up the parlor floor—
“next, a whistle screaming,
“and it’s half past four!”

The sun was struggling ficklely
to clear the thickened air
and only made it sickly.
The lad was walking quickly
and did not feel nor care
that fog was settling thickly
in throat and eyes and hair.

But thought about his lady,
then slowly of his work
which kept him from his lady,
and wondered if the lady
had made him late for work.
Took out his watch—“Oh lady!
“Why won’t this damn thing work?”

A spot of light was growing
through woolly window-grime,
a shop clock, gilded, glowing,
with tangled pointers showing
the moon, the date, the time.
He got his watch to going
then heard a church bell chime.

BANDS AND REBELS

That clock was wrong! He hurried.
There came a rocking blast
and all the air was flurried
with flakes of smut which scurried
as plunging trucks went past.
He picked his way and, worried,
he reached the plant at last.

He went right in and greeted
the ones already there,
and, washing, phrased a heated
proposal speech, repeated
a sonnet, combed his hair,
came out and soon was seated
inside his fenced-in square.

What a pile of work was lying
on the desk for him to do!
How the boys outside were vying
at their carbon-pencil plying,
how the bills and orders flew!
Day was on. But day was flying,
and it brought the night for two.

Many times his calculations,
carbon-pencil marks which shone
in his desk-light's radiations,
suffered senseless alterations,
many times his telephone
roused him out of meditations
which he quitted with a groar

BANDS AND REBELS

Long and longingly he drifted
from the thought of his affair
to the letters which he sifted
with his nervous hands uplifted
to the desk-light's stringy glare.
Long and longingly he shifted
his positions in the chair.

Sleep was claiming his attention,
but he fought it from his eyes
till a curious kind of tension,
something past his comprehension,
being strangely formed of sighs,
lulled him, held him in suspension,
and he yawned in wide surprise.

Noon was mighty slow in coming
and could get here none too soon,
for his teeming head was humming,
and his fingers, idly thrumming,
tapped a never-changing tune.
He must work and quit this drumming!
Aw, he had all afternoon.

And he had the dearest lady,
and he had a date tonight
with the sweetest little lady,
with the smartest little lady.
He would love her up tonight.
Thinking only of his lady
he was wishing it were night.

BANDS AND REBELS

So he worked and mused and waited
for the morning rush to cease.
All the "detail" that he hated,
every order signed and dated,
brought him nearer night and peace.
Noon at last. The rush abated
and the whistles blew release.

He dashed across the street to hustle
himself in place and get his stew,
secured a stool by force of muscle,
read all the signs and felt a rustle,
a steamy tumult. As it grew,
the crash, the vapor, and the bustle
oppressed him and he hurried through.

He paid, and crowding out he swallowed
with thanks the murky outer air.
Uptown the newsies screamed and holloed.
He strolled uptown and idly followed
with fixed but half unseeing stare
the heaving motor trucks which wallowed
through jagged puddles here and there.

He came into the shopping section
and soon had reached Amusement Row.
Crowds pushed along in each direction.
He made his way, with some deflection,
to where the two had planned to go.
He stopped to make a brief inspection
of posters heralding the show.

BANDS AND REBELS

He bought the tickets, but returning
with sagging head and lagging feet
he nagged himself at every turning
to overcome a hopeless yearning
to sink exhausted to the street.
His cigarette was dully burning,
the taste was dull, it had no sweet.

He came on in, depressed, dejected,
in time to see the others leap
from desk and table, and directed
a janitor to get connected
with brush and pan, come to, and sweep!
sat down to view the work expected
and wished and wished that he could sleep.

Eagerly the pencils started plying.
Eagerly the negro pushed his broom.
Scraps and paper sacks were quickly flying
off the littered floor, and, swelling, dying,
whistles one by one began to boom.
Trying not to hear them he was sighing,
sick of this electric-lighted gloom.

"Darling," he was thinking, "are you waking,
"rising only now to eat a bite?
"sleeping while my heart was slowly breaking,
"maybe you have dreamed how I was aching,
"out of reach of you and out of sight—
"just to earn the money I am making.
"Darling, wish with me that it were night."

BANDS AND REBELS

Night!—when no man owned him and oppressed him,
setting him elaborate, inane
tasks whose insignificance distressed him,
questions whose absurdities obsessed him.
Night—with no misuses for his brain.
Suddenly new confidence possessed him.
Night and love were worth the daily strain.

Night would bring his crushed imagination
once again to life to pulse and thrill,
healed of every bruise and laceration,
reveling in its emancipation.

Night would give him back his damaged will.
Day would seem a dim hallucination,
work the dream of some one who was ill!

Night would surely come and bring his lady.
Night was bringing her and she the night.
Work might try to take him from his lady.
Day might try to hold him from his lady.
These would pass to nothing in the night.
Nothing now was real except his lady,
nothing but his lady and the night.

He buckled to the work and kept severely
from talking matters over in his mind,
and, sinking all in business, viewing clearly
the work of his department, while sincerely
provoked at having got so far behind,

BANDS AND REBELS

he grappled with his problems or he merely confronted them and instantly divined.

While gaining on his duties he was gaining oblivion from thoughts and from desires.

The deftness of an over-clerk was draining the life blood of the man, who, uncomplaining like any good machine that never tires, was probably unconscious of the straining of tightened nerves, high-strung as singing wires.

Half conscious of a body, numb, inflated with nausea from the trash that lunchrooms serve,

half dreading that his rally was belated, but wondrously exalted and elated by mastery and speed which could not swerve, he darted on, intensely concentrated, with dangerously active brain and nerve.

When later he was slackening, astounded he noticed it was nearly time to quit.

He finished what was left and, hounded, hounded by sleeplessness and weariness, he pounded his forehead with his fist and swayed a bit.

The rapture of intensity rebounded, and helplessly he let himself admit he was not he: each day and all day, working and punished if he stole a thought from work. If ever any human thoughts were lurking within his rented mind they set him shirking

BANDS AND REBELS

and hoping as a man and not a clerk.

Life dwindled then to eating and to clerking
or starving if we dared to think and shirk?

And every night, all night, he wasted sleep-
ing—

except tonight, and why not this one too?—

When first he came to town his pulse was leap-
ing

with boyish aspirations out of keeping
with humdrum and the kind of life he knew.

His hopes had crept away—no, still were creep-
ing,

each working day deprived him of a few.

And all he had to do was court a lady,
and all the time he got was in the night.

No interests were his but in a lady,

no intellect for him, no, just a lady,

no leisure time to live in, just a night.

They took your life and gave you back a lady
and finally an everlasting night.

Conviction which was violent and heady
possessed him at the crisis of his woe,
but wishing he were quit of this already,
yet vowed to see it through, and keeping steady,
he waited till the final blast should blow,
to go back home, clean up and get all ready
and take a God damned female to a show.

Dark of the Moon

OUT of the all-night lunchroom and back on
the seat
of his taxicab, that has hauled some funny fares,
been shot at and wrecked and run a race or two,
while the other drivers in town were making
tame little four-bit trips on the Avenue.

Hard place this innocent-looking street
with its junky stores and wooden porches and
stairs,
a gas tank over it, freight yards around it,
dark holes where dopy crooks are sleeping,
dirt alleys where slinky things are creeping,
but a lot of loose money, rich tips for the risks
he is always taking,
and a ringside seat at some weird, outlandish
affairs.

Queerness, meanness, unnatural scores to settle—

Something is up. A light in the hardware
store—
from a burglar lantern? a pocket flash—
traveling, darting around on the walls and floor.

BANDS AND REBELS

Prowling figure. Not after the cash.
Has gone right past the money drawer.
Woman. Is hunting for something. Has found
it.

A granite kettle!
And, grabbing it, straightens up and is out
through the alley door.

Ordinary water pot.
She could find as good on the vacant lot—
Couple appear from nowhere and give him a
call.

Woman: the same that was prowling around in
the store?

Probably not,
but carries a bulging object under her shawl.
Strained, set look in her eyes and her face is
white.

Man: such a ghastly grin as you never saw be-
fore.

Polacks probably. Foreign and big and blond.

"Go where is water."

"Take you to Kegan's pond?"

"Big water," a sweeping gesture.

"The reservoir?"

"Water *go—strim* water."

"The river?"

"Doss right."

BANDS AND REBELS

And the cab is clipping along through a moon-
less night
so black that you hardly know which is factory,
warehouse, or sky,
and the "docks" with their cleated runways and
orderly stacks
of barrels, crates, and gunny sacks,
and the coalyards, feedyards, and stockyard
fences and racks
are big, too big, as they travel past your eye.

Back in the car his Polacks are mumbling,
chanting—
what are they saying?—
in an endless, whispery singsong. Praying?
They better pray if he crosses the tracks in high.

Under an arching viaduct, slim and white,
through moving lines of blazing, smoke-shot
light
from switch engines darting, slowing, discharg-
ing steam and panting.

Now for the fun. Look out for the dicks and
shacks.
("And say, you Polacks, keep on praying.")
And ducking, circling, balancing, tossing,
in front of a pilot, back of a tender,
(with the hot light shooting into your shoulders
a fire that stays and itches and smolders)
and grazing a fender,

BANDS AND REBELS

tilting and swaying,
but never missing the boarded crossing,
the cab goes jouncing across the tracks.

Out on the weedy river road.
Darkness that hurts you after the glare.

Thrilled the Polacks and gave them a scare?
They haven't missed a word of their prayer
nor raised their voices nor held their breath.
Probably never knew they were there,
in the midst of a dozen kinds of death.

Now no sound but that whispery song
and the swish at the wheels and the cluck of a
toad
scrambling awkwardly out of the road.

Everything black and shapeless and still
except where his headlight is feeling the way.

Air is full of a damp, raw chill
and a smell that is old and rank and strong.
Some of the blackness turns to gray,
and you hear the river pushing along.

Headlight shows him a sort of a bay
and a weed-grown path down a sandy fill.

Stopping the cab, "Is this all right?"
and glancing back through the open partition,
he sees the Polacks change position
and the woman stuff that kettle out of sight.
(Praying to that! But they certainly were.

BANDS AND REBELS

Blessing it, anyway. Making . . . mysterious . . . signs.)

And even their figures are dim in the pitch-black night,

but he knows that the woman's face is a ghastlier white.

(All the time she was chanting those creepy lines wasn't she crying?)

While the man looks murder at him and anxious comfort at her.

Itchy silence.

"Go to a better place?"

The woman starts up with the kettle—all wrapped—in her hand,
and—testing that flashlight!—is out on the slope of sand,

and the man, still seated, is leaning close, very close, to the driver, with fierce eyes plainly meaning,

"Try to spy on her now and I'll smash your face."

("Do it, too. But I'd risk it for one good look, if she wasn't crying.

"Say, this isn't a place to be fooling around.

"Bat him with something and go and see if she's drowned?")

But here she comes. A clink and a slopping sound

BANDS AND REBELS

and the woman is back in the cab, with her pot
all ready to cook. . . .

"Now—go—graveyard," the Polack says.

"Which one?"

Gesture of "Any."

The woman whispers, and then,

"Cat'lic," he says.

"Which one?"

The gesture of "Any" again.

"Holy Sepulcher?"

"Yeh."

A tame and tiresome run,
the weedy meadows changing to dinky streets
with miles of plaster and frame and trees like
posts.

Better shut the partition between the seats.
And he knows the minute he does it the chant is
begun.

("Watch them both at the graveyard. This
will be good.

"Holy Sepulcher. Raised in the neighbor-
hood.

"Kids ran through there at night never thinking
of ghosts

"but scared to death of 'the caretaker's Gatling
gun.'

"Even now I'd bet on us getting shot—

BANDS AND REBELS

"Grandmother Flaherty! Have to call on her soon.

"Spoke the Irish. Could talk for days and days
"of ghosts and witches and weird Old Country ways—"

Polacks—Old Country people—*stolen pot—graveyard—running water—dark of the moon.*)

There is her house.

And now they are passing the gates.

Acres of crowded crosses and dusty trees.

Hole in the fence in a bushy, secluded spot.

The woman is out with the kettle and flashlight
once more.

The man is blocking the view with the same
fierce look as before.

So the driver whispers,
"Jigger, the caretaker."

Polack whirls, and the driver sees
the woman crawling along on her hands and
knees

and searching the grass.

Seems to know he is looking and jumps to her
feet and waits.

Polack turns and slugs him, and flashing minutes
pass. . . .

And now with a million questions bursting his
head

that otherwise is slowly beginning to clear,

BANDS AND REBELS

he is driving his fares to the lot by the hardware
store,
meaning, the minute he drops them, to rush back
here

and drag poor Grandmother Flaherty out of bed.

Murderers, bandits, yeggs, he has hauled be-
fore,

and a murder, a hold-up—a slugging—at least
you can understand,

but to steal a granite pot and sing it a whispery
tune,

go to the river to fill it and risk the sliding
sand—

What were they after? what did they do and
why?

What, for awhile, was making the woman cry?

How did she know he was looking? and why is
his jaw still sore?

But what can a gas-house American hope to
know

of weird Old Country ways in the dark of the
moon?

Never sleep till he knows. And will never
really know.

Gentle Descent to Kindly Earth

HE finished the apples and cookies, then lay—regardless of chiggers—and looked at the sun through tangles of leaves and layers of shade, and drowsily heard the rhythmical sound, the *clatter* and *clink* the Mexicans made shoveling ballast and hammering track, out of sight a rod away.

He mustn't leave garbage lying around.

He buried the cores and crumbs in the loam and crumpling the empty paper sack he felt for a match, dug left and right, shirt pocket, pants pockets, he hadn't a light; pants pockets and shirt—not a single one; and there still were four—five—cigarettes that he had to smoke or he couldn't go home.

If his mother caught him with pills, good night!

He stretched himself out full length and frowned.

He in long pants, distinguished and tall, a high school freshman—or would be next fall. A football hero? He wondered and sighed. A leader of men? He thought with dread

BANDS AND REBELS

of the fight he fought each night in bed
and sometimes as now when out alone,
the fight he must win if he lived at all;
the resolutions, temptations, regrets,
the talks from grown-ups, their hideous threats:
"Asylums are full—" He gave a groan.
He must win for sanity, health, and pride.
He must be a man. Then a leader of men. . . .
Run after by women. . . . He groaned again.
Women. Not shapeless grade school girls,
sniffy and starchy and smelling like soap,
telling teacher and chewing their curls.
But women. With necks and breasts and hips
and a look in their strange, inhuman eyes
to invite you, forbid you, and set you on fire.
A touch of the hand—a rush of desire;
a kiss—hell gathered between your lips
to hurl you up to the flaming skies
and fling you down where you couldn't rise.
They made you dream convulsive dreams.
They were dreams themselves, relentless dreams.
And you couldn't escape. Not a chance. No
hope.

Languor possessed him, too sweet to resist.

The locusts above in the heavy trees
whirred, and the whir was tremulous, faint,
louder, louder, a throbbing din
ecstatic, spasmodic, intense, insane,

BANDS AND REBELS

a stunning chant of a glorious sin,
then feebler, feebler, a whicker of pain.

Ambition and courage sighed off with the breeze.

Leadership? Football? They didn't exist.
Manhood? Not worth it. To die being kissed
into shimmering visions haloed with mist
was better than being a boy scout saint!

He took a card from his pocket and gazed
not at ELLYN ADAIR: SIX REELS OF THRILLS,
at immaculate beauty in gauzy lace.
Unearthly sorrow transfigured the face
and the tapering limbs were bound with cords
to an incandescent cross which blazed
in a sky not hidden by leaves but raised
over sparkling plains and glittering hills.

Fiends approached with the seven swords,
and She, with endurance august, sublime,
saw the steel transfix her heart
and looked away, to earth, to him.
Not hers then but his to feel the dart
of anguish tearing through every limb.
Upward! To her! . . .

He lay dismayed.

The *clatter* and *clink* the Mexicans made,
shoveling ballast and hammering track,
brought him to. The trees came back.
He jumped to his feet in the nick of time.

BANDS AND REBELS

Dizzy and sick he traversed the glade
with the paper sack and the card in his hand
and in his mouth a cigarette.

Out to a world of glare and sweat.
A maze of gleaming railroad tracks.
Willows. Cottonwoods. River sand.
Boxcar houses and tarpaper shacks.

The section gang. He approached the boss.
"Mister," he said, "can I have a light?"

The greasers grinned in shy delight,
anticipating the boss's joke.

The man swelled up, important and cross,
then, only half unkindly, said,
"Get along with ya, kid, yer too little to smoke."

Never mind. Across the track
in a clearing of weeds was the gypsy shack
where swarthy people would come and stay
till they'd sold some horses, then going away
would leave utensils and things behind
for other gypsies, or boys, to find.
There were always matches there. . . . And a
bed. . . .

Carried along but hanging back,
he penetrated a forest of weeds
and, choked by a shower of raspy seeds,
came to the clearing. And stopped. And
gaped.

At a motor car as big as the shack,

BANDS AND REBELS

immense and new and bright in the sun.
At a kitchen range. At a gypsy maid
who stirred the prunes, retired to the shade,
then looked him over with mischievous eyes.
Pretty. A woman. Already shaped.

She indicated his cigarette
with friendly authority. "Give me one."
Struck a match for the two. And inhaled!

Hell or anything else in her eyes?
Dreams? Destruction? Human fun.

Tremendous relief came over him, strange
relaxation, grateful surprise
at finding his notions a mess of lies,
and along with the apple and cookie sack
Ellyn Adair went into the range.

"Is that a wonderful car—you bet!"

She winced. "Looks nice, but the thing won't
run.

"That's once my daddy's judgment failed.

"He got it for me. Driving it here

"he'd make a mile, tinker awhile,

"start it at last—and it wouldn't steer.

" 'Tain't often they sting the old man on a deal,
"but they did on that one."

"I'll bet it's all right.

"Bet I can fix it."

"You'll get all hot

"and dirty for nothing. The thing's a fright.

BANDS AND REBELS

"Le's go in the house."

They sat on the cot
on the ratty, greasy rainbow quilt.
Laughed and joked. Quietly smoked.
Then the girl jumped up to see to her meal.

He dug the dirt floor with toe and heel.
Nights untroubled. Strength entire.
Leadership. Manhood unimpaired.
Actions unhampered by fear and guilt.
Brain to settle things. Women? Fool!
They were funny, of course, but a lot like men.

The girl came back and sat down again.
A touch of the hand. No rush of desire.
Nothing to it. Pleasant. Cool. . . .

A kiss? . . .

"Get out!"

Then she looked up scared.

Horses!

Her eyes were wide with alarm.

"Daddy," she screamed, "put down that
knife!"

The boy ducked under a brawny arm,
out through the door and ran for his life,
with the murderous parent a step behind.

Two hobbled horses. Between them head first.
They squealed and plunged. The gypsy cursed,
was pinned between them, got loose again,
and the lad was a hundred yards ahead

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making straight for the railroad track.

("Kill me in sight of fifty men?")

But the gypsy, hurt, half crazed, half blind,
showed no signs of turning back
and was gaining, gaining.

("Gosh, I'm dead!")

Each step a stagger. Each breath a sob.

Mexicans grinning.

"Sa matter, pal?

"Been trying to buzz the gypsy gal?

"Sonny, beware them endearing young charms.

"—But I'll fix papa," the gang boss said.

A stream of Spanish to one of the crew.

The breathless boy jumped nimbly aside
and the gypsy ran into the boss's arms.

"You God damn greaser, get back on the job.

"Pick up yer shovel and give me that knife.

"Go home for lunch and stay all day?

"Is that how my workmen earn their pay?"

The gypsy protested and struggled and
growled,

but the flat of a shovel, smartly applied,
made him yield. . . . To bide his time.

"You ain't a greaser? All right, you ain't.

"But all the same yer gonna do

"some honest work for once in yer life."

The gypsy looked up from his work and
scowled.

BANDS AND REBELS

The boss didn't notice. The boy felt faint.
The gypsy bent down, maturing his crime.
Gypsy vengeance. Undying hate.
A man unaware of unspeakable fate.
These passions! Oh for common sense.

The boy raced back to the girl, "Don't cry!"
dried her tears and held her tight.

"Daddy will butcher him! Daddy," she
howled,

"they'll hang you, then I'll go crazy and die."

No, honey, our passions were not so intense
as we tried to make them—God knew why!
Revenge? How about a financial loss?

"You want to get back at that section boss
"yet keep him from having his liver cut out?"

She nodded hopefully.

"Then," said he,
"kid them both—I know you can—
"and tell your father to sell him the car."

She welcomed the plan with a merry shout
and hugged him with grateful—admiring—glee.
"You're the smartest man in the world. You
are!"

(While he thought, "I'm sure the car's all
right.

"Bet I can fix it. I'm dying to try.

"He'll get a bargain.)—Well, good-by.

"Words can't express what you've done for me."

Bughouse Square

LUMBERING jar of traffic below in the
street;
twanging whine of machinery further away;
voices, voices from the courthouse steps, from
the doors
of labor agencies, chili parlors, and stores;
a hint of freshness at last in the burnt out air;
and Bughouse square was beginning another day.

The secretary of Swede the Wobbly sighed.

"Swede," he uncovered the typewriter, "what
shall we say?"
and prepared to edit the pamphlets that none
would read
and polish his chief's addresses that none would
heed,
and, feeling more than ever alone and set aside,
looked out the window again over Bughouse
square.

Their rivals, the preachers, cranks, and fakers
down there
on soap box pulpits were already drawing the
crowd.

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Bindle stiffs with their beds and homes on their
backs,
Mexican gandy dancers from the railroad tracks,
cowmen up from the stockyards with bare brown
necks
(a wealth of silver and leather trimming their
hats),
office men in their shirt sleeves, and shantytown
rats,
drifting along, were stopping awhile for the treat
of an entertaining heresy, clever cheat,
or startling mania. Bored they were moving on
to gape at the Jesus screamer who made most
noise,
and just as the hat was passed to them moving
again,
though a witty faker could hold them even then.

Now the shooting-gallery, penny arcade,
or tamale cart was catching the transient trade
of an ever varied, never deserted square,
thronged from dawn till midnight and from mid-
night till dawn
stewing in moist insomnia, panting aloud
the desire, despair, discomfort, and mucky
thought
of hundreds of miscellaneous human wrecks.

"Swede," he fingered the typewriter, "what
shall we say?"

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in exasperated awe. That doctrinaire
slept at night and serenely believed what he
taught!

Swede grinned and point by point the pamphlet progressed.

More Karl Marx and a pile of statistics to-day
to prove to men where their common interest lay.
Common interest! Millions on millions of men,
each essentially alien to all the rest.

The clamor swelled in the ever increasing
heat.

It was day in earnest and one by one the boys
from the harvest fields and the road came drifting in

to pay some dues and boil up a shirt and read.
As they settled down, each in a world of his own,
the hum of routine added a note to the din
of the wrangling workday world in conflict
without.

Solidarity! unified purpose indeed!
Gather all that together and give it an aim?
But writing lies was at least an absorbing game
and crowded out of the mind the cruel unrest
of thought and self and being alive and alone.
One forgot to puzzle, one's eyes forgot to ache,
and easily, rapidly, words and phrases came

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which the bland Swede would publish as gospel,
no doubt.

Now the mail would be brought. It was already here.

A whistle, a knock, and Swede was rising to take the bundle, ripping it open, calling, "All out! "Bughouse square, boys!" and hurrying down to the street.

Thought of the shattering turmoil right at one's ear,
the eyes of idle dozens confronting the eye
and for once agreed in a blank, unsensing stare,
cost the lulled and diverted assistant a groan,
but, "Fellow workers, we must take old Swede a chair,"
and now to compete with the sharps of Bughouse square,
with the shrewdest, loudest, longest-winded, and best,

Swede, impulpited, waving his leaflets on high,
was dogmatizing bravely to the empty air:

"Slaves of the system! as we meet on common ground—"

Lumbering jar of traffic attacking the square,
twanging whine of machinery further away,
multitudinous discord of dissonant day,
separate shock of every dissociate sound,
[acutely distinct the impact of every wheel,

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the individual shriek of each piece of steel),
voices, voices from the courthouse steps, from
the doors
of labor agencies, chili parlors, and stores,
calls unblended though the meaning of each was
drowned,
were crashing proof. Solidarity was a lie.

“—we must pool our thought, unite in the
common fight—”

Cowman, loafer, and casual sauntered along,
each with a wistful but wary look in his eye,
each absorbed in his problem: details of a deal,
plan of campaign to capture a job or a meal;
yet seeking a brief distraction—and something
more?

Did the “fellow workers” loyally standing by,
ready to cheer at a signal or start a song,
look to Swede to relieve them of thought and
will

and deceive them out of the war of selves awhile?

Clash of cross purpose that shivered the world
of men!

But Swede was determined to prose his crowd
away,

“—as all for one and as one for all to fulfill
“the historic mission—” Applause. “—of the
working class.”

The crowd continued to form, to scatter and pass,

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and cowman, loafer, and casual went and came.

"Swede," a man was protesting, a redheaded man,

a faker, an old, old-timer, Quin was his name,
"you're working my corner, Swede, and I want it bad.

"I've got a gross of platinum rings and I lose—"

There were murmurs:

"The bums' rush!"

"Don't!"

"Naw, Quin's all right!"

—a gurgling convulsion of sound, a sudden roar,
and the faithful piled to the curb more dead than alive:

"Look—out—boy!"

"These damn trucks!"

"They don't care how they drive!"

—then, "Swede, aw pardner," Quin was protesting again.

With his far-off look and eternal, printed smile,

Swede, self-hypnotized, merciless, being sincere,
was drawling above the confusion, "One fight more.

"You have nothing to lose but a chain—"

"Swede, see here."

"—and a world to gain—"

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"Well, you've lost your crowd, my lad.

"I'll tell you, pardner—"

"—Slaves of all nations, unite!"

"Listen. You can't hold a crowd and you know I can.

"I can shake the nickels out of their clutches, too.

"Give me my corner and I'll tell you what I'll do.

"I will sell your leaflets. See? Then you get away

"and let me peddle these elegant rings. What say?"

Swede gulped and, stalled for a word, looked down at the crowd.

"Well Swede?"

"Let's hear the spieler!"

"We want to be shown!"

"I've been working Bughouse square," Quin argued, "for years,

"and I know by heart every speech you people use.

"How's this? 'You lousy scissor bills!'"—laughter and cheers—

"'you think a vote is a pork chop,'" and the faker bowed.

Swede was thinking visibly, almost aloud.

The secretary, amused, now caught his eye and unmistakably signaled, "Let him try."

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Swede sighed and got down and Quin ascended a throne.

A gibe he flung at the loafers made them his own.

The "fellow workers" were his. The promiscuous pack drawn by the quarrel with Swede became as one.

He made a bid for his rivals' crowds and they came.

Cowman, farmer, and casual, sauntering back, jostled by hatless clerks who arrived at a run, owned a master's determining thought and became rapidly, thankfully, one harmonious whole.

Swede, who had stood there doubtfully shaking his head, was laughing aloud. A laugh out of Swede, instead of that bland, unmeaning, and aggravating smile!

Mexicans giggled at wit in a foreign tongue and listened, rapt, to jargon in a graver tone.

Conmen and cowmen muttered as their hearts were wrung by industrial wrongs and oppressions they never had known.

Radicals heard, as if it were startlingly new, the speech they had heard so often and so often made.

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The secretary, whose breath but not yet his mind

had been taken away by Quin's imperative style, saw, confounded, the receptive subjects respond to words? to a look, a gesture of waving a wand.

"Solidarity? unified purpose?" thought he.

"So what I wrote and doubted was partially true
"and men *have* something in common and *can*
be combined.

"One touch of credulity makes us kin and kind?

"Credulity, mover of mountains, try moving
me!

"We'll get a million nickels in the hat—"

and then he felt the crowd-solidarity roll

over his reason and inundate his soul

with Faith, tumultuous, vast, and beyond control.

"That bindle stiff's a fighter, and that one, and
that.

"Their fervor shan't subside. I've got a plan.

"I'll march them through the city in a jubilee
parade.

"This crowd is up to anything. We're one, and
who's afraid?

"The working class will join us. Here goes the
last crusade.

"Heavens! who'd have thought there was a
brotherhood of man?"

Yes, Something for Him

HOT from his bath he reached his room,
still dripping
with moisture and with languor in his head.
He thumped his muscles which the cold was
nipping,
hung up his suit, and held his breath while slipping
between the heavy covers of the bed.

He called downstairs, "Hey, mother, I am
through!"

He placed his watch inside the slip and drew
the quilts around him, shuddering to view
the cold white bedstead and the chilly spread.

Sis certainly was braver than her brother
if she could go and dance on such a night;
and rolling first to one side then the other,
then steadying, he wondered if his mother
would sit and watch the fire while it was bright,
would think of many things, then sit up straight
to find that she was cold, that it was late,
and half unwillingly resume the wait;
he wondered with a wonderful delight.

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He felt that he was hidden, and surrounded
by whiteness in his room like that below.
The air was like a powder finely pounded,
the sidewalks and the curbing smoothly rounded,
the terraces and steps curved off with snow.
And everything out there was white and still.
He could not hear a car grind up the hill.
And all inside was loneliness and chill.
But warmth was coming, he could feel it grow.

The secrecy and loneliness suggested
the presence of a phantom at his side,
small, virginal, and slim, and warmly nested,
not venturing to tremble while he rested
aloof from his imaginary bride.
The nightwear of the phantom, starched and
fresh,

should rustle with the tremor of "her" flesh;
her heart should writhe inside a lacy mesh;
her great unwinking eyes should open wide.
At leisure he would alter his position
and reverently blind her with her hair.

He yielded to a fancy, with suspicion
then freely while prolonging her submission,
that she and not himself was lying there,
that only as the figure of her dream
he lived at all, but in it was supreme,
her breath, not his, went sailing up in steam,
the loneliness was hers, not his, to bear.

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He knew her for a distant recollection
from school days, and remembering each treat,
each party, and a gift of her selection,
the honors she had won at class election . . .
walking with her proudly up the street . . .
he wondered what could make the tick, tick,
tick,
which, coming out of something soft and thick,
died down, died down, then, growing loud and
quick,
thumped at his eardrums with a swaddled beat.

He laughed. It was his watch. And as he
chuckled,
still flustered by the flurry at his cheek,
the agitated bedstead gently truckled,
the coupling of the bed springs swayed and
buckled.

Tonight was not the middle of the week!
He meant to sleep all night and half next day.

He drew the covers down a little way.
He must get up and put the watch away,
he must! but lay and made the bed springs creak.

He gathered up the cover at his shoulder
to gather all the warmth the bed could make.
If anything the air was keener, colder.
He waited till he felt a little bolder,
more equal to the leap he was to take,
then, thinking of week mornings when he tried

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to bring himself to consciousness and slide into his clothes, turned over on his side and gave the heavy quilts a grateful shake.

On Monday, heaps of letters stacked for filing. Sunday, he must fritter out the day, reminded that the work was piling, piling. He shuddered at "the day of rest," and, smiling, he wished he might one Sunday see a play as quaint, with as ironical a quirk as his life—he, *he* posing as a clerk!—and, hoping sis might never have to work, smiled at her eagerness to earn her way.

He wondered where she got the crazy notion!

"You're ready, sir, to give us all you've got?"

(Ambition, personality, emotion the price of this ridiculous devotion.)

"I am, sir," but he certainly was not!

The manager had asked him that, the day he started on the job. What could he say?

"He'll have me up because I came away 'this afternoon, but—' and he soon forgot.

Success? Promotion? He had all he needed: a house where mother, sis, and he could live snugly enough; an income which exceeded their calls upon it, while if he "succeeded" the family as well as he must give all that they had and were. To get ahead! He was a plug, and seldom thought or read,

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but when at night he lay awake in bed
worlds were his own to humor and forgive.

A memory from other days and places
could occupy the present at his call
and decorate his fancy with the graces
of tenderness and privacy, with traces
of something that was not of him at all.
The memory could sweeten and perfume
the bleakness and the darkness of the room.
He need not lie and marvel at the gloom,
bewildered by the closeness of the wall. . . .

For, heavy with increasing satisfaction,
in fancy he could feel himself allied
in secrecy and sacred interaction
with some one whose imperative attraction
had drawn him unresisting to her side,
with some one who like him had lain alone
imagining the blissful and unknown,
had chosen him and made her wish his own—
over her courtiers, he thought with pride.

His wanderings, his years of reckless chances,
the life in which his girl had had no voice;
her faithful, with their manners and their
glances;
her life of entertainment and romances;
were nothing; she had dreamed, and dreamed a
choice.

Her choice was of the man she had not seen

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as vagabond or cog in a machine
and sought as one outside her tight routine
in whom to suffer strangely and rejoice.

Could women who were whimsical and clever
and hung on every word you had to say
feel lonely and forsaken—could they? Never!
Call up forgotten figures? Need they ever?
Attentions kept them busy night and day.
A dreamer who while wandering had sought
communion with one image must be taught
to live his love. He knew it, and the thought
was painful till he smiled it all away.

The faithful she had always kept around her
in school days, he had liked, and he had had
their counsel at the pool hall when he found her
too busy with the social ties that bound her—
dated by some other likely lad!

He might have looked them up on coming
back
and kept in touch with her. But losing track
of all the crowd he had not felt the lack,
and was not sorry, was honestly glad.

The fellows at the office were amusing.
It might be fun to travel with them. Still,
he figured that he had no business losing
security of solitude and choosing
positions mighty difficult to fill.
The family, he knew, could not afford

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to let him go and waste his little hoard.
And so he dreamed, and found his full reward
in fancies coming, going, at his will.

Then pleasant, if deliberately genial,
as doubtless the boys were, he had not found
in any work-and-pleasure ridden menial
a partner as devoted and congenial
as members of a band which went around
destroying and upbuilding, singing songs
defiant with the memory of wrongs,
who rode the trains in gallivanting throngs
and founded states while sleeping on the ground.
Adventurers with faces tanned to leather,
idealists unhampered by the real,
tormented by society and weather,
they swaggered onward, singing all together,
and smoked to keep from wishing for a meal.
As prisoners they raised a joyous din
and terrified the town with brass and tin.

Was he like that? Not now, but he had been,
and once had stirrings which he still could feel.

He wondered at the recklessness, the daring,
the fortitude his former self had shown,
the infinite capacity for bearing
toil, want, humiliation; and, comparing,
he shuddered at the hardships he had known.
Those bitter nights that he had passed, one fall,
wrapped in newspapers in the Wobbly hall!

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And had he lost that dauntlessness? Not all, or how could he live on, aloof, alone?

He wondered at the talent he had given to soap box and to propaganda press; remembered half ashamed how he had driven and sweated his assistants—they had thriven on sacrifice, but cursed, nevertheless.

He called up all the days and nights, the men helping him in the noisy little den, the telegram bringing him home again, the mournful trip, and all the old distress.

The journey on a seat—no thrills, no dangers—
desolate but mercifully brief,
arrival at the house crammed full of strangers,
the sympathizers, preachers, and arrangers,
the hideous contrivances of grief,
the body of his father, mute, that lay
protesting at the clamorous delay—

He braced himself to fight the thought away and turned to other figures for relief.

The pulse beat of the watch, a steady trickle of cheerfulness, was regular and sane, then, curiously, it grew confused and fickle, and, lessening and racing, seemed to tickle some cavity or other in his brain.

The luxury of merely lying still was generously comforting until

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that picture rose. He gripped his slackened
will,
and all his body tightened with the strain.

The presence of his lady might deliver
his memory from what had taken hold.
A body glided in, which did not quiver,
which did not throb nor move, which made him
shiver,
which huddled there all shrunken—not with
cold.

Revolted by the horrible grimace
that travestied the unforgotten face,
he begged his girl to have the Christian grace
to come and fill his thoughts which dread con-
trolled.

She came, but fully clothed, with men of
fashion
escorting her outside the social whirl,
regarded him without a trace of passion,
with condescension, not without compassion,
and, "I have nothing for you," said the girl.
"You leave me and you never write for years.—
"He thinks there are no other men, my dears!"
she told her friends. They looked at him with
sneers
and she with lips that barely seemed to curl.

The fellows at the office might have taken
his mind away from sorrow with their noise.

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The specter at his side remained unshaken.
And suddenly he felt himself mistaken
in asking them to share their doubtful joys.

"The family, you say, is your best friend.
"You never join the crowd, you never spend.
"You make a face when you are asked to lend.
"And we have nothing for you," said the boys.

The grading-camp, the harvest field, the
quarry
the prison and the busy little den,
the recklessness, the misery and glory,
the happenings that filled the varied story,
could cheer him, and he called them up again.

"You take responsibility, amass
"indebtedness for us and let it pass.
"You leave the cause to join the middle class.
"And we have nothing for you," said the men.

He wondered if the hurry and the bustle
of workdays could not dull his sense of loss.

The specter never moved a lifeless muscle,
and yet he seemed to feel the covers rustle
as shrinking from a shape which they must cross.

"You bolshevik! you dream our time away.
"The company to you means only pay.
"The work piles up. You leave and stay all day.
"And I have nothing for you," said the boss.

He turned again for comfort, tried to flatter
his solitude by thinking he could do

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no better than to leave what did not matter
and sacrifice the romance and the chatter
for mother and for sis. And that was true.

"You never talk to us nor treat to shows.

"You mope and wonder where your money goes,
"then risk your job, what for, nobody knows.

"And we have nothing for you," said the two.

So being universally rejected,
not bringing any comfort of his own,
and tired of asking favors not expected
from images of persons not connected
with anything in him, he gave a groan,
then, thinking of a name plate and a wreath
with something semi-human underneath
and dragging in his breath between his teeth,
admitted that he lay there not alone.

The body, although wasted, although
shrunk,
seemed heavy, and the bed was weighted down.
The sockets of the eyeballs, although sunken,
were vivid with a glare which, wild and
drunken,
was brighter than the snow that hid the town.
The clutching of the frozen hands, the feet
twisted into a death grip on the sheet,
and all the air unsavory, unsweet,
were real, however he might shrug and frown.

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How often had that hideous abortion,
when human and before the human form
had given up distinction and proportion
and taken on extravagant distortion—
how often had it lain here safe and warm,
closed in from all the jostling of the day,
shut into reminiscence, tucked away
from outside life, from ludicrous display,
and sheltered from the white and silent storm.

How often had that thing as man reflected
good humoredly on trials small and great.
How often had he felt himself neglected—
how often had he felt so and suspected
that egotism brought about his state?—
How often had he smiled away his pain,
how often slipped away into a train
of warming thoughts. How often had he lain
and drowsed, not sleepy though the hour was
late.

He fancied that the bed was now containing
just one. The dead. Where there were two be-
fore.

The living disappeared and ceased complaining.

And yet he thought for two, at last attaining
some courage for the hardships yet in store.

"There's nothing. We must worry, we must
plan,

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"look whimsical, and want the least we can.

"Go on, my son."

"I will, old man, old man,"

he whispered humbly. Then he thought no more.

For everything was white, white snow, white cover,

and everything was tranquil in the room,
and everything was poised and seemed to hover—
expectant as that lady of her lover—

expecting something white born of the gloom
and more subdued than it, not fiercely bright.

The darkness was a gentle grayish light,
and all the world inside and out was white,
was white, was white, and seemed to be in bloom.

Now there was something. Nothing, though,
that mattered.

He swayed away to join the snowbound dead.

There came a shock. What was it? What
was shattered?

A roar rang through the house. The door was
battered.

The house was shaken by a clashing tread.

Confusion. Voices. And the roar, the roar.

Again the battering against the door.

Sly stillness, and the sounds roared out once
more.

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He tried to rise. He could not raise his head.
The stair was being tramped by furious cattle.
The house was rocking, it was swung around.
The roar became an intermittent rattle.
It rose again into the roar of battle.
He tried to move. He could not. He was
bound.

"We had a lovely dance," one bandit said.
"I've locked the door. Do, mother, go to bed."
Something was hammering against his head,
tick, tick it came, a rush of little sound.

He laughed, but did not set the springs in
motion.
He lay impassive with immense delight.
There came the silence following commotion.
He lay there viewing, with a strange emotion,
the chairs, the bed, half hidden from his sight.
A great relief came on him where he lay,
and great relief was bearing him away,
relief from all the worry of the day,
relief from all the terror of the night.

What was there to regret when one was
sleepy?

Yes, there was something for him, he could
sleep.
The world was fading. It was getting sleepy.
The room receding. It was getting sleepy.

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Even the restless watch was half asleep.
Sleep warmed the air and drove away the chill.
Sleep glided on. He lay serenely still
and, sleepily surrendering his will,
sank dreamily into a dreamless sleep.

THE END

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